

Week of August 19, 2002: MaineDOT Flash Facts

Topic: Drowsy Driving

Monday

(Opener/Facts)

- Being drowsy behind the wheel is dangerous.
- Every year about 700 crashes in Maine occur due to sleepy, fatigued drivers. About 10 people are killed and 500 injured.

Driving drowsy leads to:

- Slower reaction time
- Decreased on-road awareness
- Impaired judgment

(Effects of driving tired are similar to driving effects from drugs or alcohol (slow or no response, weaving and other dangerous behaviors). And, just like drugs and alcohol, sleepiness can contribute to a collision.

When driving, look for the warning signs of fatigue:

- Can't remember the last few miles driven
- Drift from travel lane or hit a rumble strip
- Experience wandering or disconnected thoughts
- Yawn repeatedly
- Have difficulty focusing or keeping eyes open
- Tailgate or miss traffic signs
- Have trouble keeping head up
- Keep jerking vehicle back into the lane

Recognize and React to drowsy signs early (you cannot predict when a micro-sleep may occur)

Wednesday

(Opener/Facts)

In a national survey, 25% of the adults reported dozing off while driving.

The national estimates for annual drowsy and fatigue related crashes are:

- Approximately 100,000 reported crashes involve drowsiness/fatigue as a principal causal factor.
- 1,500 fatalities (this is a conservative estimate)
- At least 71,000 people are injured

Drowsiness/fatigue probably plays a role in crashes attributed to other causes:

- Sleep deprivation and fatigue make lapses of attention more likely to occur.
- Drowsiness also can lead to irritability and anger (Risky crash qualities)

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Who Is Most At Risk?

Drivers who are:

- Sleep-deprived or fatigued
 - Driving long distances without rest breaks
- (continued)

- Driving through the night, the early afternoon, or at other times people are prone to fall asleep
- Taking medication that increases sleepiness
- Drinking alcohol
- Driving alone
- Driving on long, rural, boring roads
- Frequent travelers (e.g., business travelers, commercial drivers)
- Shift Workers (Studies suggest that 20 to 30% of those with non-traditional work schedules have had a fatigue-related driving mishap within the last year. The drive home from work after the night shift is likely to be a particularly dangerous one.)
- Young People (Are most prone to fall-asleep crashes. Risky activities include staying up late, sleeping too little, and driving at night)

Best defenses for Driver Fatigue:

- Get plenty of rest (most important)

If you do recognize signs of fatigue when on the road:

- Find a safe place to stop for a break. (Pull off into a safe area away from traffic and take a brief nap (15 to 45 minutes))

Friday

(Openers/Facts)

Sleep Disorders:

- The presence of a sleep disorder increases the risk of crashes. (Sleep disorders affect an estimated 30 million Americans and include chronic insomnia, sleep apnea and narcolepsy.)
- Most people with sleep disorders remain undiagnosed and untreated.
- Sleep apnea occurs in 4% of middle-aged men and 2% of middle-aged women.
- Sleep apnea creates a three to seven fold increase in crash risk.

Consult a physician (or a sleep disorders center) for diagnosis and treatment if you suffer frequent daytime sleepiness, have difficulty sleeping at night often, and/or snore loudly every night.

What are **not** effective defenses for drowsiness:

- radio or loud music
- open window or other "tricks" to keep awake
- coffee or other sources of caffeine

Safety tips when making a trip:

- Get a good night's sleep. (This varies from individual to individual, but the average person requires about 8 hours of sleep a night.)
- Plan to drive long trips with a companion. (Passengers can help look for early warning signs of fatigue and switch drivers when needed. Passengers should stay awake to talk to the driver - but if they will be driving, they too must be sure they get adequate rest.)
- Schedule regular stops (every 100 miles or 2 hours)
- Avoid alcohol and medications (over-the-counter and prescribed) that may impair performance. Alcohol interacts with fatigue; increasing its effects — just like drinking on an empty stomach.)